

Message Text

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PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 TRSE-00 /050 W
-----021982 101234Z /12

O R 101210Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BONN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9278
INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USMISSION USNATO
USMISSION USBERLIN
AMCONSUL BREMEN
AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMCONSUL FRANKFURT
AMCONSUL HAMBURG
AMCONSUL MUNICH
AMCONSUL STUTTGART

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BONN 10672

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, GW
SUBJECT: FURTHER THOUGHTS ON THE JUNE 4 STATE ELECTIONS
IN HESSE AND LOWER SAXONY

REF: (A) BONN 10216, (B) BONN 10443

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BEGIN SUMMARY. FALLOUT FROM THE JUNE 4 ELECTIONS CONTINUES TO DESCEND ON THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC. WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF THE CSU, ALL MAJOR PARTIES ARE DISTURBED BY WHAT HAPPENED LAST SUNDAY. THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FDP ARE SERIOUS. CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT HAS STRONG REASON TO WORRY ABOUT THE HEALTH OF HIS COALITION PARTNER, WHICH

ULTIMATELY AFFECTS THE ABILITY OF HIS GOVERNMENT TO
FUNCTION. END SUMMARY.

THE PROBLEM FOR THE FDP

1. SIMPLY PUT, THE FDP HAS A PROBLEM OF POLITICAL
SURVIVAL: HOW TO STAY IN NATIONAL POLITICS. MORE THAN
THE SPD AND THE CDU, THE FDP HAS DEFINED ITSELF AS A
PARTY OF COMPETENT MANAGERS WHO GET THINGS DONE; PRO-
GRAMMATIC COMMITMENT HAS PLAYED A LESSER ROLE IN THE
PARTY'S SELF-IMAGE. FOUR PROMINENT MINISTERS IN BONN,
HOWEVER, CANNOT OFFSET
VOTER UNCERTAINTY OVER WHERE THE PARTY STANDS, GIVEN
ITS WILLINGNESS TO FORM A COALITION IN EITHER DIRECTION.
2. SINCE LAST SUNDAY, FDP LEADERS HAVE MET ALMOST
ROUND-THE-CLOCK, IN A DESPERATE EFFORT TO FIND OUT WHY
THEIR PARTY FAILED IN HAMBURG AND LOWER SAXONY. THE
JUNE 4 DEBACLE HAS NOT IMPROVED FDP CHANCES IN HESSE
AND BAVARIA, WHICH GO TO THE POLLS IN OCTOBER.
IF REMEDIES CAN BE FOUND, THE FDP MUST APPLY THEM
IMMEDIATELY.
3. FDP CHAIRMAN HANS-DIETRICH GENSCHER AND HIS PROTEGE,
FDP BUSINESS MANAGER GUENTHER VERHEUGEN, MAY NOT EMERGE
UNSCATHED FROM THE SELF-EXAMINATION THAT IS NOW UNDERWAY.
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LAST SUNDAY'S ELECTIONS EFFECTIVELY SCOTCHED THEIR
STRATEGY OF KEEPING COALITION OPTIONS OPEN IN BOTH
DIRECTIONS: HAVING DONE JUST THAT IN HAMBURG AND LOWER
SAXONY, THE FDP LOST BADLY IN BOTH CASES.

4. THIS TRAUMA COMES AT A PARTICULARLY BAD TIME FOR THE
FDP, WHOSE LEADERSHIP HAS BEEN WEAKENED BY RESIGNATION
(MAIHOFFER) AND ILLNESS (GENSCHER, MISCHNICK). INDEED,
THERE IS REASON TO QUESTION GENSCHER'S ABILITY TO STAND
THE PACE THAT THE NEXT FEW MONTHS WILL IMPOSE, IN VIEW
OF THE EXTENSIVE CONVALESCENCE WHICH HIS COLLAPSE LAST
FALL ENTAILED.

5. THE HISTORICAL CURVE OF FDP PERFORMANCE IN THE FOUR
STATES VOTING THIS YEAR ALSO HAS A GRIM MESSAGE: I.E.,
THE FDP FACES THE DANGER OF TOTAL ECLIPSE IN THESE
LAENDER, UNLESS IT CAN ARREST A DECLINE WHICH HAS OCCUR-
RED SINCE THE EARLY 1960'S.

A. IN THE LAST FIVE LANDTAG ELECTIONS, THE FDP WON THE
FOLLOWING PERCENTAGES IN LOWER SAXONY AND HAMBURG. (1974
WAS AN ABERRATION, PARTLY DUE TO THE TIMING OF BRANDT'S

RESIGNATION AS CHANCELLOR.)

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1963 1967 1970 1974 1978

LOWER SAXONY 8.8 6.9 4.4 7.0 4.2

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1961 1966 1970 1974 1978

HAMBURG 9.6 6.8 7.1 10.9 4.8

B. THE FDP FARED LITTLE BETTER IN BAVARIA AND HESSE.
IN THE LAST FOUR STATE ELECTIONS, IT WON:

1962 1966 1970 1974

BAVARIA 5.9 5.1 5.6 5.2

HESSE 11.5 10.4 10.1 7.4

WHERE THE FDP VOTERS WENT

6. IN BOTH HAMBURG AND LOWER SAXONY, THE FDP HAD A NET LOSS OF VOTES TO ITS COALITION PARTNER. IN HAMBURG, THERE IS A DIRECT CORRELATION BETWEEN FDP LOSSES AND SPD GAINS; THE SPD WON BACK MOST OF THE VOTERS THAT IT HAD LOST TO THE FDP IN 1974. IN LOWER SAXONY, THE FDP LOST VOTES TO THE CDU AND THE SPD, AND TO THE PROTEST GROUPS.

7. THE JUNE 4 RESULTS SUGGEST TWO VOTER TRENDS WHICH HAVE ALARMING PORTENT FOR THE FDP: (A) A DRIFT TOWARD A TWO-PARTY SYSTEM, WHICH COULD PUT GREAT CENTRIFUGAL PRESSURE ON FDP RANKS, AND (B) A DRIFT TOWARD NEW PROTEST GROUPS WHICH COMPETE DIRECTLY FOR POTENTIAL FDP VOTERS. IF THE OCTOBER ELECTIONS SUPPORT THESE TRENDS, THE FDP WILL HAVE AN EVEN ROCKIER ROAD AHEAD.

THE NEWCOMERS

8. IN THE JUNE 4 ELECTIONS, THE PROTEST GROUPS (GREEN
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LIST, ETC.) GAINED AT THE EXPENSE OF ALL TRADITIONAL PARTIES. YOUNG VOTERS FOUND THEM PARTICULARLY ATTRACTIVE, WHILE THE OVER-35 GROUP GENERALLY DID NOT. THE PERCENTAGE OF THE UNDER-35 VOTE WHICH WENT TO THE GREEN LISTS WAS:

18-25 26-34

LOWER SAXONY 14 7

HAMBURG 24 14

9. GREEN LIST SUCCESS IN NORTHERN GERMANY IS CAUSING SIMILAR GROUPS TO CONSIDER FOLLOWING SUIT ELSEWHERE. IN ADDITION, A NASCENT TAXPAYERS PROTEST PARTY, LED BY AN SPD MEMBER (HERMANN FREDERSDORF), IS ALREADY ON THE SCENE. THIS PROSPECT TROUBLES THE SPD AS WELL AS THE CDU.

THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF HESSE

10. AN FDP FAILURE TO CROSS THE FIVE-PERCENT MARK IN HESSE WOULD HAVE TWO MAJOR CONSEQUENCES: IT WOULD BRING THE PARTY TO THE BRINK OF RUIN, AND IT WOULD CRIPPLE ITS ABILITY TO FUNCTION AS AN EFFECTIVE PARTNER IN THE COALITION LED BY CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT.

A. A FAILURE IN HESSE WOULD ACCELERATE AN EROSION OF FDP RANKS. CONCERNED OVER THEIR FUTURE IN A MORIBUND PARTY, FDP POLITICIANS WOULD BE SUBJECT--AND IN SOME CASES WOULD PROBABLY SEEK--ENTICEMENTS TO JOIN THE CDU OR THE SPD.

B. BETWEEN NOW AND OCTOBER, THE FDP WILL BE CAMPAIGNING FULL-TILT. SOME GOVERNMENT BUSINESS WILL INEVITABLY SUFFER, AS FDP LEADERS SEEK TO RESCUE THEIR PARTY--AND
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THEMSELVES--FROM OBLIVION. (FOR EXAMPLE, WE HAVE HEARD AN INFORMAL LAMENT FROM THE FOREIGN OFFICE THAT, WITH REGARD TO FRG PERFORMANCE AS EC COUNCIL PRESIDENT, VERY LITTLE WILL HAPPEN UNTIL AFTER THE OCTOBER ELECTIONS, AND POSSIBLY NOT UNTIL AFTER THE FDP NATIONAL CONVENTION IN MID-NOVEMBER.)

C. CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT AND THE SPD THEREFORE HAVE GREAT CAUSE TO WORRY ABOUT THE PLIGHT OF THE FDP. THE SPD CANNOT GOVERN ALONE IN BONN; IT MUST HAVE A VIABLE PARTNER. IN CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES, THE FDP ONLY PARTLY FILLS THAT ROLE.

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D. AN ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION IS THAT AN FDP DEMISE
IN HESSE WOULD PROBABLY GIVE THE CDU A TWO-THIRDS
CONTROL OF THE BUNDESRAT. THE UNION, SHOULD IT CHOOSE
TO SEEK CONFRONTATION, COULD THEREBY STYMIE THE SCHMIDT
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GOVERNMENT AND/OR WIELD AN EVEN GREATER INFLUENCE OVER
GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION. THERE IS ALSO THE POSSIBILITY
THAT, IF FDP FORTUNES CONTINUE TO DECLINE, THE UNION
MIGHT SEEK A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN THE BUNDESTAG, A LA
BARZEL'S NEAR MISS AGAINST BRANDT IN 1972.

THE OPPOSITION

11. IN LIGHT OF THE JUNE 4 ELECTIONS, THE CDU/CSU HAS OPTED TO DEFER, OR AT LEAST TO PLAY DOWN, FURTHER DISCUSSION OF THE FOURTH-PARTY CONCEPT, AT LEAST UNTIL AFTER THE OCTOBER ELECTIONS. MEETING IN BONN ON JUNE 8, THE CDU/CSU STRATEGY COMMISSION AGREED ON THIS COURSE.

12. THE TWO OPPOSITION PARTIES STILL DIFFER ON HOW THE UNION CAN BEST RETURN TO POWER IN BONN. KOHL PREFERS AN ALLIANCE WITH THE FDP, AN ELUSIVE OPTION. STRAUSS PREFERS SEEKING AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY WITHOUT THE FDP, AND POSSIBLY VIA A NATIONWIDE CSU. FOR THE MOMENT, THE CDP AND THE CSU APPEAR DISPOSED TO BURY THEIR DIFFERENCES, AND TO WAIT AND SEE WHETHER THE AFTERMATH OF JUNE 4 WILL YIELD FURTHER DIVIDENDS.
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